



Office of the State Auditor

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## **State Auditor: Oversight Lacking in Medication Management at Division of Youth Corrections Facilities**

DENVER—A performance evaluation issued by the Colorado Office of the State Auditor (OSA) has found that facilities under the purview of Division of Youth Corrections did not always adhere to Division policies and/or national standards for managing medications prescribed to committed youth. This means either that the Division of Youth Corrections lacks controls to ensure that prescribers follow accepted practices, or the controls are not working.

For example, in 22 of 60 sampled cases the medical records did not indicate what diagnosis or symptoms prescribed medications were intended to treat. In 8 of 11 cases where youth reported having asthma, the facilities provided treatment without any diagnostic work to confirm the condition.

In 57 cases, psychotropic medications were prescribed to youth, but there was almost no evidence that vital signs such as blood pressure, weight, and heart rate were taken when youth entered the facility or when medications were changed, in accordance with national standards. In 13 cases, there was no evidence that medical staff had obtained consent to use psychotropic medications. The evaluation also found problems with some facilities complying with state and federal rules for the management and disposal of controlled substances and other medical hazardous waste. As a result, the facilities could not be sure that controlled substances were not diverted for illegal use or sale and that hazardous waste did not pose a risk to the environment and public.

The Division of Youth Corrections oversees 48 facilities which house about 851 committed youth between the ages of 10 and 21 at any given time. Of these, about 86% are in facilities that provide on-site medical care. Facilities that provide on-site medical care for committed youth are expected to adopt and follow industry standards and best practices in prescribing, administering and monitoring prescription medications.

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The report makes six recommendations for addressing the issues identified in the evaluation.

The OSA contracted with Health Management Associates to conduct the evaluation.

The full evaluation report is available electronically on the OSA's website,

<http://www.state.co.us/auditor>, via the link called "OSA Audit Reports."

Under the direction of the state auditor, the OSA is the state's nonpartisan, independent external auditor with broad authority to audit state agencies, departments, institutions of higher education, and the Judicial and Legislative Branches. The OSA's professional staff serve the people of Colorado by addressing relevant public issues through high-quality, objective audits and reviews that promote accountability and positive change in government. Performance audits address whether programs operate in compliance with laws and regulations and in a manner that accomplishes intended program goals. Financial audits include annual audits of the state's basic financial statements and federal grants on a statewide level. IT audits review procedures and technology to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of the state's critical computer systems and taxpayer data. The OSA also tracks about 4,000 Colorado local governments for compliance with the Local Government Audit Law.